

US Mission to UNESCO Deputy Chief of Mission Stephen Engelken

Remarks at the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris

May 30, 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen, Messieurs et Mesdames, Ambassador McBride, Messieurs Mohen, Jouanny, Delpuech, and Van Praet, it is a great honor to be with you here today. I know that Ambassador Oliver regrets that a last minute scheduling problem prevented her from coming. I also regret that the State Department's technical experts on these issues cannot be with us this morning.

I am glad to represent Ambassador Oliver today, because I want to underline how determined my country is to combat the illicit trade in looted cultural objects and how much we value UNESCO's work in this area. If you permit me, I would like to deliver the remarks the Ambassador would have made.

Since 1983, the United States has been a party to the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. The Department of State is the U.S. agency responsible for carrying out U.S. implementation of our obligations under that Convention. As part of that responsibility the Department is focusing attention on Red Lists for countries with which the United States has bilateral agreements under the Convention.

The U.S. – Peru bilateral agreement is one such agreement. It entered into force in 1992 and has become a model of cooperation not only with respect to mitigating the illicit movement of Pre-Columbian archaeological material and Colonial Period ecclesiastical ethnological material. Our agreement with Peru has also proved to be a model in promoting professional training in conservation and museum practices, the preparation of inventories of collections, and promoting interchange of cultural property for cultural, educational and scientific purposes. In recent years the US Customs and Border Patrol has recovered many hundreds of objects of Peruvian origin and repatriated them.

As further evidence of U.S. expression of respect for Peru's cultural patrimony – since 2001, the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation has supported 8 projects in Peru, ranging from the preservation of Peruvian textiles, mummies, and funereal offerings to planning, cataloging, and preventive conservation support at archaeological sites and other museums. To date, support from the Ambassadors Fund represents a commitment in excess of US \$187,000 to the preservation of Peru's cultural heritage.

We would like to pay tribute to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) which has done outstanding work in producing these Red Lists. This is not the only Red List project in which the U.S. is participating. We have in past years supported similar Red Lists for Iraq and Afghanistan, and we are currently supporting development of such lists for Cambodia and Mexico/Central America. Press events like this one in major European and

American cities have successfully raised public awareness about illicit traffic in cultural heritage objects.

Red Lists are also an important means of communicating to the law enforcement community, as well as to dealers and collectors, the types of objects that are vulnerable to being looted from the country of origin and therefore have no documentation of provenance. The Lists are an educational tool intended to inform, to call attention to the problem of looting that destroys the record of mankind, and to promote a trade in documented material. We understand that customs and law enforcement agencies of France and other European countries depend on the Red Lists as an important reference tool. The U.S. is convinced the Red Lists increase international cooperation within the framework of the 1970 UNESCO Convention to help restrict cross border illicit trading activity.

Our support of the ICOM Red List for Peru and for other countries signals U.S. seriousness to work with the international community to mitigate looting and illicit trade in objects representing the cultural heritage of other countries. Congress made clear in a report on the legislation that implemented the 1970 Convention that, and I quote, “*The United States considers that on grounds of principle, good foreign relations, and concern for the preservation of the cultural heritage of mankind, it should render assistance in these situations.*”

We have implemented Congress’ will in a variety of tangible ways. For example, the United States is a member of UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to Its Countries of

Origin or Its Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation. Moreover, the United States agreed just a month ago to provide UNESCO \$239,000 in extra-budgetary funds to support completion of UNESCO's online, searchable, multi-language Cultural Heritage Laws Database. This increases to \$442,000 the total US contribution to this project. Specifically, these funds will be used to support official English translations of cultural heritage laws and other legal provisions submitted to UNESCO by Member States. These funds will also encourage Member States that have not done so to submit legislation for translation and to promote the use of the Database by law enforcement agencies, museums, galleries, collectors, and others having legal questions concerning cultural objects that may have been illegally exported, imported or acquired. We are pleased that to date the legislation of 114 Member States has been published online at the Database Website.

Before closing, we would like to acknowledge the close and effective contribution of other countries and organizations – with whom the U.S. closely collaborates – toward the global effort to protect the world's threatened cultural heritage. I would like to conclude by paying tribute to my colleagues with me here: the ambassador of Peru and representatives of ICOM, Interpol, and French museums. This must continue to be a truly international effort. We are happy to do our part.